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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000243

SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR EAP/BCLTV; CINPAC FOR FPA

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV BM

SUBJECT: REGIME HAMMERS ACTIVISTS WITH LENGTHY PRISON TERMS

REF: 03 RANGOON 1314

Classified By: DCM Ron McMullen for Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

¶11. (C) Summary: The SPDC has handed down prison sentences ranging from 7 to 17 years to six university activists who distributed a handful of leaflets criticizing the regime's "road map for democracy." This harsh treatment is business as usual for a regime that tolerates no dissent. Meanwhile, Burma's neighbors continue to send special envoys and VIPs to Rangoon, but few are willing to address human rights issues.  
End summary.

¶12. (C) The Burmese regime, at a secret trial inside Rangoon's infamous Insein prison, handed down on February 20 sentences ranging from 7 to 17 years to a group of six young political activists detained since September 2003 for distributing leaflets that criticized the SPDC's "road map for democracy."

¶13. (C) The six convicted activists were part of a larger group of university students originally detained o/a September 26 (reftel). In addition to the students, authorities had also detained and later released U Win Naing, a former U.S. Embassy FSN and veteran political activist. Neither U Win Naing nor any of the sentenced activists are members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) or affiliated with registered political parties. However, they are strong supporters of the pro-democracy movement and are frequently referred to as Burma's "Third Force" or "Third Way" of independent activists who join the NLD and the pro-democracy ethnic groups in opposition to the regime.

¶14. (SBU) The students allegedly distributed a handful of leaflets in Rangoon Division last September, in which they called on the SPDC to honor the 1990 elections (that the NLD won decisively) and urged Burmese citizens not to support the regime's seven-point road map.

¶15. (C) According to Embassy sources, all six of the student activists were convicted of undertaking prohibited political activities. In addition, two students, Nandar Sit Aung and Kyaw Soe Moe, were convicted of "illegal assembly" for organizing the group. Nandar Sit Aung, who received the longest sentence (17 years), was also convicted under immigration provisions of the law for having contact with Thailand-based exile groups.

¶16. (C) Embassy sources identify the following student activists sentenced at Insein Prison on February 20:

Nandar Sit Aung: Sentenced to 17 years.

Zaw Lin Tun: Sentenced to 12 years.

Kyaw Soe Moe: Sentenced to 12 years.

Han Win Aung: Sentenced to 7 years.

Lwin Ko Lat (aka Win Ko): Sentenced to 7 years.

Kyaw Kyaw: Sentenced to 7 years.

¶17. (C) Comment: These harsh sentences are business as usual for a regime that tolerates no dissent. Regretfully, among a long parade of regional leaders calling on the generals since the unveiling of the road map last August (the latest including the new Malaysian Prime Minister and the new Filipino Foreign Secretary; see forthcoming septel), scant few are willing to raise concerns over human rights abuses.  
End summary.

Martinez